

HIGH LIGHTS ON THE NEWS OF MOTION PICTURES—STUDIO GOSSIP

THE NEW MOVIES

By Robert E. Sherwood

THE success of "Merton of the Movies" as a novel and as a play has been accepted in various quarters as a deliberate rebuke of the silent drama by the literate public. People are so sick of the movies, we hear, that any one who seeks to satirize them and teach them their place is enthusiastically hailed as a deliverer.

One more or less dramatic critic in reviewing "Merton" said that he hoped it would be strong enough to force the movies to shut up shop.

This is a silly notion. One might as well say that the theater should go out of business because it is effectively kidded in "Six Characters in Search of an Author."

As a matter of fact, neither Harry Leon Wilson, who wrote "Merton of the Movies," nor Kaufman and Connelly, who dramatized it, were aiming so much at the movies as at Merton. He is really the arch-criminal in the case, for he is the person who is responsible for the quality of the films. As H. L. Mencken has observed, "The kind of jackass who likes the movies as they are is the man who keeps them what they are."

Merton Gill and all his brethren are well satisfied with the movies in their present state, as Messrs. Wilson, Kaufman and Connelly have been careful to point out.

Merton Gill is actually an allegorical figure. He represents and speaks for that vast element in our fair land which swears off further mental development on its fourteenth birthday. The sympathy which is generally expended on him is strengthened by the knowledge that he is typical. He is the public.

The movies are not to blame for Merton Gill; he is to blame for the movies. It is he who pays the salary of Beulah Baxter, the wonder woman of the screen; it is he who subscribes to all the fan magazines and believes their stories about home life in Hollywood; it is he who sends his savings to correspondence schools in acting and scenario writing, and it is he who resolutely rejects all attempts by the more enlightened members of the movie gentry to venture into the realms of intelligence.

It is true, of course, that the silent drama has served to organize the Merton Gills and to give them a single end of purpose which they never had before. Ten years ago their humble interests were distributed over a wide variety of subjects. Now they are concentrated on one focal point.

We doubt, however, that they are any the worse for it. Certainly their imaginations are stirred more by a Griffith picture than by a perusal of a Sears-Roebuck catalogue. Their aesthetic senses receive more encouragement from a two reel scenic than from an attempt to learn to play the auto-harp in ten lessons. They derive more intellectual stimulation from a film like "Toll of the Sea" than from the novel that Bertha M. Clay ever wrote.

We have no intention of setting ourselves up as a target for hoarse laughter by stating that the movies are actually uplifting the Merton Gills and Tessie Kouranes or pointing the way to better and finer things; but we do maintain, and stoutly, that the movies have brought into the lives of such people an appreciation for drama, romance and beauty which they never possessed before.

And if the movies should shut up shop to-morrow, and if every camera and every inch of perforated celluloid should vanish from this earth, Merton Gill and all his little playmates would still be stupid—still be inexplicably pathetic.

All this should not be interpreted as an adverse criticism of "Merton of the Movies"—book or play. In both forms it is one of the sagacious, saddest, funniest commentaries on life that we have ever read or seen.

No true devotee of the cinematographic art can afford to ignore "Merton of the Movies." It makes us stop and think—if such a thing is possible.

A press dispatch from Portland, Me., tells us of Mrs. Blanche Doyle, a resident of that city and the possessor of many grandchildren, who has never been to the movies. She has no knowledge of who the Hollywood stars are or where Hollywood is, and has no desire to learn. Indeed when asked whether she liked Charlie Chaplin she naively inquired whether he was a boy in the fort near by.

We sincerely trust that Will H. Hays will do something about this without further delay.

We have a letter from a gentleman in Alaska who protests against the theory, advanced in so many movie melodramas, that the Canadian Northwest Mounted Police always "get their man."

He explains that they have been after him for nine years, with negligible success.

We have always been suspicious of these stories about the miraculous efficiency of the Canadian cops. But then—perhaps this cynical attitude is influenced by the fact that we have spent so great a part of our life in New York city.

In Current Photo Plays Along Broadway.

BEBE DANIELS in "SINGED WINGS" RIVOLI

BUNNY GRAUER in "ONE TOWN THAT FORGOT GOD" ASTOR

ANNA MAY WONG in "TOLL OF THE SEA" MAY IN NATURAL COLORS RIALTO

HELEN FERGUSON in "HUNGRY HEARTS" CAPITOL

Real Life Parallels of 'Merton of the Movies'

THE Kaufman-Connelly adaptation, "Merton of the Movies," it is very wise to point out, since the comedy has opened at the Cort, has had several very unusual parallels in real life, of which the author, Harry Leon Wilson, knew absolutely nothing, since they developed since he wrote the story. Of these perhaps the most striking was the case of Count Edward Zichy.

Some Theatrical Sidelights

The next incumbent at the Nora Bayes Theater will probably be "Hayseed," the Davidson and Le Maire production, with Mr. and Mrs. Jimmy Barry, Emma Haig and Olin Howland, which will probably begin using the house elevator in two weeks.

Harry Beresford plays "The Old Souk" with rare likeliness, but he is hardly the man to be in the character of the hero in the play. The other day he was observed leaving the Plymouth Theater and getting into a taxicab with a suitcase, while his overcoat pocket held a bottle, carefully wrapped in paper.

Pictures of the Week

ASTOR—"The Town That Forgot God," directed by Harry Millard. CAMEO—"What Pools Men Are," adapted from Eugene Walter's play, "The Flapper." Directed by George Terwilliger. CAPITOL—"Hungry Hearts," based on stories by Anna Yezierska; directed by E. Mason Hopper. CRITERION—"When Knighthood Was in Flower," directed by Robert Vignola, with Marion Davies. LYRIC—"Douglas Fairbanks in 'Robin Hood,' directed by Allan Dwan. RIALTO—"The Toll of the Sea," a Technicolor picture. RIVOLI—"Singed Wings," adapted from Katherine Newlin Eurt's story. Directed by Penrhyn Stanlaw, with Bebe Daniels and Conrad Nagel in the cast. STRAND—"East is West," adapted from the play by Samuel Shipman, with Constance Talmadge.

Charles B. Cochran, London producer, has bought the English rights to "Rain," taking hardly a minute to go after it when he discovered what a dramatic oyster it was. However, he is still undecided whether to have London absorb it immediately with Tallulah Bankhead in the leading role, or to wait a while until Jeanne Eagels is ready to turn on the tears in London, which she is eager to do.

As this column is carried to press the player who would succeed Frank Bacon in the chief "Lightning" company had not yet been chosen by the gods through their earthly representative, John Golden. After Bacon's withdrawal John O'Hara stepped into the role in the Chicago company. Which is the first line company. But it isn't likely that O'Hara, though an

excellent actor, will head this company when it marches upon Boston next month. It will probably be Thomas Jefferson, son of the famous Joseph—and thereby hangs one of the big surprises of the dramatic firmament—the discovery, one might say, of a new star. Jefferson was never ranked in the first flight as an actor, but recently on tour through the West he has seemed to come into his own in an Indian summer like that of the beloved Bacon.

George S. Kaufman has sold his advertising skit, "Life in the Back Pages," one of the brightest bits from

the program of the Forty-niners, to "The Greenwich Village Folies," and it will be inaugurated at the Shubert Theater with much pomp and circumstance to-morrow.

Will Morrissey is taking into vaudeville with him "The Love Girl," the musical comedy travesty by F. P. A., as well as "The Dance of the Small Town Mayors," a phase of life as seen by Marc Connelly.

"Virtue" closed a week ago last night after easily breaking the short run record for the season, having opened the preceding Thursday in opposition to John Barrymore's "Ham-

let." It was written by William Everett Mosses, a lawyer in Nashville, Tenn., who is in his middle age but was still optimistic about subduing Broadway. He induced two other Southerners to form the Empire Play Producing Company, and they went to it.

The closing fulfilled the prophecy of one of the press agents who was invited to handle the publicity, and who, after seeing a rehearsal didn't hesitate to talk himself out by saying the play would fold up next Saturday. It took the author, he said, eight years to write it, but it required only four performances to undo it.

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